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SUBJECT: Media Reaction - Georgia/Ossetia/Russia

Summary: Over the weekend Swedish media in correspondent reports, analytical articles and editorials gave considerable coverage to the war between Georgia and Russia over South East Ossetia. General consensus was that Georgia's aspirations for NATO membership was one of the reasons for Russia to take action. Another was the multinational struggle to control the gas and oil pipelines in the region.

I. - It was reported that Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt was deeply concerned over developments in Georgia and the Caucasus and that he reminded Russia of its responsibility and called for the country to show restraint.

"The way in which the situation in South Ossetia has deteriorated is a cause for profound concern. It is extremely important that all those involved show restraint and play their part in bringing about a political solution," said Carl Bildt in a Foreign Ministry statement.

Media reported that Bildt in a statement also expressed concern about the impact of the conflict on civilians.

"Georgia and Russia are dangerously close to war and there is a great risk of this spreading to other parts of the Caucasus. No state has the right to intervene militarily in the territory of another state simply because there are individuals there with a passport issued by that state or who are nationals of the state," Bildt said.

"Attempts to apply such a doctrine have plunged Europe into war in the past... And we have reason to remember how Hitler used this very doctrine a little more than half a century ago to undermine and attack substantial parts of central Europe," he said.

It was reported that Sweden has called for an immediate end to bombing raids and the withdrawal of Russian troops that have entered Georgia to allow for a peaceful solution to the conflict. On Saturday, Sweden joined calls for an emergency European Union summit on the escalating conflict in Georgia.

"There must be a very strong response on the part of the European Union," said Bildt, according to the TT news agency.

II. - On August 11 the conservative Stockholm morning daily "Svenska Dagbladet" on its debate page ran an article by Torgny Hinnemo, foreign policy analyst at the MFA, in which he noted that the Russia-Georgia military conflict is a result both of the big-power game between Russia and NATO and a long-standing regional antagonism.

-- On August 11 apolitical Stockholm business daily "Dagens Industri" editorialized on "Too Early to Talk about a New Cold War."

"If Russia does not wish a head-on confrontation with the West but instead is keen to get some legitimacy for its actions, it better move onto the strenuous negotiation path....

"However, the Georgia crisis must, in spite of it all, still be regarded as an isolated and very serious local conflict and not as a beginning of a new Cold War. It should not be explained by claiming that it is an effort by Russia to take control of the Georgian oil pipe between the Caspian Sea and Mediterranean or by alleging that

Russia wishes to regain parts of its lost empire.

"Over the weekend Foreign Minister Carl Bildt perhaps was too quick to state that Russia - by its obscure statements about being entitled to protect Russians in other countries - thereby has introduced a new doctrine. However, should he be correct it will have far-reaching consequences, not least for Sweden's defense policy."

III. - On August 9 independent liberal Stockholm morning daily "Dagens Nyheter" editorialized on "Russia Show its teeth" stating that,

"The situation is the most serious one since the violent conflict that resulted in South Ossetia's declaration of independence in the early 1990's. From day one Ossetia has enjoyed strong support from Russia while Georgia has had the West and the U.S. on its side....

"Russia has strongly opposed Georgia's NATO aspirations while the U.S. has wanted to speed up Georgia's NATO membership application process....

"The EU cannot keep up its present attitude towards Russia - a strategy that seems to be, at all costs, to avoid provoking the Russian bear. A relation that is based on fear of confrontation is neither healthy nor durable in the long run. Russia's military outrage must be condemned; its geopolitical greed must be criticized. Otherwise there is an obvious risk that we soon will see a similar scenario in Russian-supported Abkhazia."

IV. On August 9 the conservative Stockholm morning daily "Svenska Dagbladet" ran a comment by foreign editor Claes Arvisson who blamed Vladimir Putin for the present situation.

"With Russia giving support one of the parties in the conflict and the U.S. to the other, we can expect a frostier climate in world politics." SILVERMAN